


 splash!

quick facts on...

Lake Okeechobee Works of the District (LOK WOD) Permitting Program

Working to make a difference!

DECEMBER 2006

The South Florida Water Management District is a regional, governmental agency that oversees the water resources in the southern half of the state. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts.

Our Mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving water quality, flood control, natural systems, and water supply.

Agricultural producers may choose to participate in the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Best Management Practices program. This is a cost-sharing program where landowners can receive money to assist with Best Management Practice implementation and eliminate the need to apply for a Works of the District permit. For more information, please call the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services at 863-462-5881.

Lake Okeechobee serves many users. Not only does the 730-square-mile lake provide a natural habitat for fish, wading birds and other wildlife, it supplies essential water for people, farms and the environment, provides flood protection, attracts boating and recreation enthusiasts and is home to a multimillion dollar sport and commercial fishery.

But the lake's health is on the brink of endangerment. Lake Okeechobee's natural resources have been threatened in recent decades by three environmental impacts: 1) excessive phosphorus loads, 2) harmful high and low water levels, and 3) spread of exotic vegetation.

In recognition of these issues, the State Legislature enacted the 2000 Lake Okeechobee Protection Act and the subsequent Lake Okeechobee Protection Program (LOPP). It is a phased, comprehensive and innovative program designed to restore and protect the lake by improving water quality and implementing long-term solutions through a variety of specific components.

A Cooperative Effort

The LOPP components are designed and implemented - with public input - by an interagency team of scientists, engineers and other environmental restoration experts. The coordinating partners include the South Florida Water Management District, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences of the University of Florida, and other agencies, organizations and landowners.

The Lake Okeechobee Protection Program consists of eight components, including the Lake Okeechobee Protection permits program and the Works of the District Permit Program. The Lake Okeechobee protection permits program is a streamlined permitting process created through the Lake Okeechobee Protection Act in which water quality considerations are included in applications for Environmental Resource Permits. The Works of the District Permit Program was established in 1989 through the Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) program for Lake Okeechobee and later incorporated into the Lake Okeechobee Protection Act. The Lake Okeechobee Works of the District Program, which is considered to be part of the Phosphorus Source Control component of the LOPP, is based at the Okeechobee Service Center. Responsibilities are to monitor water quality and to inventory and permit all non-agricultural land uses as well as agricultural lands where the owner has chosen not to participate in the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Best Management Practice program. Works of the District staff perform compliance inspections and monitoring as well as water quality surveys to identify high phosphorus source areas and coordinate with participating partners to implement solutions.

Phosphorus loads from Lake Okeechobee watersheds have contributed to excessive phosphorus levels in Lake Okeechobee and receiving waters downstream. The goal of the WOD program, in conjunction with other LOPP programs, is to reduce phosphorus loading to Lake Okeechobee to comply with the lake's Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) of 140 metric tons/year by the year 2015. This goal will be accomplished by implementing the components of the LOPP.